KENNETH ANGER BABBLES ON HOLLYWOOD BABYLON II

Joan Crawford: literally stripped bare

by VITO RUSSO

Kenneth Anger is more Hollywood than Hollywood. A malevolent yet lovable Jiminy Cricket, Anger is the impish conscience Tinseltown never had and never wanted. His notorious book, the underground classic *Hollywood Babylon*, gleefully ripped away the veil of secrecy surrounding the intimate and sometimes bizarre private lives of the film colony's most celebrated legends. A former child star, Anger became Hollywood's bad boy and a legendary figure himself when he made a series of internationally acclaimed films that shocked the public, captivated the highbrow critics and precipitated several landmark court decisions on censorship. The most famous of those films, *Scorpio Rising* and *Fireworks*, have held an endless fascination for audiences throughout the years and exhibit an unrivaled, almost primeval homoerotic sexuality.

The elusive Anger, diabolic and dishy, masculine and fey, frightening but harmless, is at it again. *Hollywood Babylon II* is, if anything, more bitchy and macabre than the original, which the *New York Times* once called "a delicious 306-page box of poisoned bon-bons." Anger elevates gossip to a kind of divine troublemaking, and in this new collection of horror stories, he stirs the manure with a pitchfork, tweaking famous noses with undisguised delight. Some of his revelations further document oft-whispered rumors from the past. The book contains the most complete account yet published of Hollywood's "pansy purges," including a frightening episode in which the Ku Klux Klan assaulted gay actor William Haines and his friends after a party in El Porto. Also detailed for the first time is the real reason Clark Gable had director George Cukor fired from directing *Gone with the Wind*. It's rather amazing how paranoid "The King" could be over a few pre-stardom blowjobs.

Vito Russo, the author of The Celluloid Closet, *is a New York–based free-lance writer. He contributes to a variety of national publications.*

Kenneth Anger elevates gossip to a kind of divine troublemaking, and in this new collection of horror stories, he stirs the manure with a pitchfork, tweaking famous noses with undisguised delight.

Most of *Hollywood Babylon II* is simply outrageous fun, more amusing than shocking and more in the spirit of nasty sport than real cruelty. There are some frontal nude shots of Joan Crawford in a chapter called "Witch Joan"; a section on Loretta Young entitled "Attila the Nun"; and a hilarious list of "Odd Couples," including Clara Bow and Bela Lugosi, Edna Mae Oliver and Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich and Claudette Colbert; plus the best of the lot — the bombshell revelation that Tallulah Bankhead was a chubby-chaser who had an affair with Hattie McDaniel.

Yet for all the startling information contained between the pages, nothing compares with the cover photo of a grotesquely overweight Elizabeth Taylor. The actress is almost unrecognizable, and many people have mistaken the photo for that of Divine. Anger thinks it's just terrific. "That photo was taken in 1979 when she was on her way home after being stoned out of her mind at Studio 54," says the author with a wicked smile.

Anger's Upper East Side New York apartment is practically a shrine to old Hollywood, an immaculate but vividly decorated memory lane containing all sorts of movie memorabilia, old photos and even a small altar to Rudolph Valentino complete with electric candles and red silk roses. The first thing Anger does when I arrive is to open a small drawer and bring out a glossy black-and-white photo. "That picture of Liz Taylor is great," he says, "but let me show you what they *wouldn't* let me print." He hands me the photo and I find myself muttering "holy shit" under my breath. It shows what *appears* to be the profile of Marlon Brando sucking the biggest, hardest dick this side of Santa Monica.

Anger settles into a comfortable chair, laughing at my open-mouthed reaction. He wears a Rangers sweatshirt with the first and last letters missing to spell out his name (a gift from "one of the players — a nice man," Anger explains). How, I wonder, would someone come into possession of such a photo, and under what circumstances was it taken? "Oh, you know how sometimes boyfriends will fool around taking pictures of each other," says Anger. "There are a few of those floating around. The dick may or may not belong to Wally Cox. We just don't know. That horrible witch who Brando married — Anna Kashfi — tried to use the picture in court to keep Brando from seeing his children, but the judge wouldn't even admit it as evidence. He just threw it out. It's actually very artistic. I told my publishers that Brando knew I had it, and he's not the type to sue over something like that. He'd just say 'fuck it' because he's above and beyond it all. But they said that some child might open the book and say, 'Mommy, what's that?' so we had to cut it. It annoys me, really, because I had the same problem with Jayne Mansfield's nipple in the first version. I had to fight like hell to keep them from airbrushing it out. It's amazing that nipples and penises are still taboo, isn't it?"

Another quite substantial section of the book nixed by publishers E.P. Dutton concerned the author's passionate hatred for the late Gloria Swanson. Anger's only comment in the published version is a succinct "Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead." The rest of the story was deemed "going too far"

The B-movie Ronald Reagan about to get the shaft

PHOTOS/KENNETH ANGER COLLECTION

by the powers that be at Dutton and ended up on the carpet. When Anger published a letter from Swanson to columnist Walter Winchell in *Babylon I* in which she called Lana Turner a "trollop," Swanson sued Anger for $30 million. Fortunately, he was able to produce a copy of her letter to Winchell. Unfortunately, Anger's publisher, Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* fame, deducted $20,000 from Anger's royalties to cover legal fees.

"It was what they call a nuisance suit," says Anger. "Any rich person can claim you slighted them, and you have to defend yourself. But Swanson was an impossible old witch. She was as mean as they come, and as she got older she got meaner and meaner. She actually turned into Norma Desmond. She was technically a dwarf, you know; she was a human Betty Boop. Her head was too large for her body." The story he proceeds to relate seems harmless and funny, but obviously not to his publishers.

"Once, Gloria and I were on the jury at the Chicago Film Festival, and we were both staying at the Tower Hotel," Anger begins. "One night at Maxim's restaurant in the basement of the hotel, I saw her rush across the room just as a woman was about to put a spoon of sugar into her coffee. Gloria put her hand over the cup and waved her finger in the face of this diamond-covered Chicago matron, shouting, 'Naughty, naughty, naughty!' Can you imagine? So awhile later I went over to Spanish Harlem and bought a small child's coffin painted apple-green. I filled it with about five pounds of white sugar and took it over to her apartment on Fifth Avenue and gave it to the doorman. So she opened it, and apparently she had a huge conniption fit because white sugar to her was like water on the Wicked Witch of the West. She called the district attorney and tried to have me arrested for attempted murder. She told him, 'I have received a bomb. Someone is trying to poison me!' It took the D.A. quite a while to get it out of her that she was talking about sugar."

Even while calling Swanson an impossible old witch, there's an innate affection in Anger's voice for the old Hollywood and its stars. "My books appeal to people's sense of humor," he says easily. "I really have a tremendous amount of affection for the illusion and fantasy of old Hollywood, and that comes through in my writing. I love how they made Swanson look beautiful even though she was deformed. It's the same with an actor like Alan Ladd. He was so small he was like a little Ken doll, and if photographed properly they made him look like a huge person. I love all that. Someone once asked my why I don't do a *Washington Babylon*. There was the Tidal Basin scandal, George Washington raised cannabis, and Lincoln was rumored to have had three gay bodyguards. There's a lot of stuff like that. But I'm just not sympathetic to people in Washington. I have no affection at all for them. I truly love Hollywood, and that's the difference."

It's no accident that his book deals almost exclusively with the old and not the new Hollywood. He tells me an unprintable story about a current superstar who keeps a huge rock of cocaine on a table in the dining room so that guests can shave off a spoonful at random. "They're just not that interesting," he says, shaking his head. "All the larger-than-life people are gone. I have resisted writing about the new Hollywood stars only partly because they're still alive. The other reason is that they're devoid of the old magic. Hollywood today is doing away with its own magical qualities and burying itself in an avalanche of self-congratulatory awards."

Anger reserves his true fury for the witches and meanies of Hollywood, but he can be quite sympathetic to its victims. In the same way that he wrote about Frances Farmer with sympathy and respect in *Babylon I*, in his sequel he pays affectionate homage to his favorite director, Busby Berkeley. "These are people ruined by Hollywood," he says. "Busby Berkeley was tormented by Jack Warner. What happened to him couldn't have happened anywhere else in the world . . . only in Hollywood. It was a great, great tragedy that he couldn't go on making movies, especially after coming back years later and making a film like *Million Dollar Mermaid*. His films are awesome works of American art."

It was the old Hollywood and its twisted sense of morality that allowed Anger to explore the hidden, unmentionable homoerotic urges lurking in the corners of the dream factories in his film *Fireworks*, which he made in 1947 when he was only 17 years old. "I was reading the poetry of Rimbaud when I was 12," he says. "But there will always be people interested in taboo things. You have to understand that all through history we've had the pendulum effect. The idea of the human race becoming progressively more liberal and tolerant is just a bunch of bullshit. Don't you believe it. There are things going on in South America right now as bad as the Holocaust. Jerry Falwell and his crowd would like to see people put into camps, and we're getting closer and closer to that all the time. There are only a few people interested in exploring hidden sexuality at any given time."

JAMIE SPRACHER

Anger, the enfant terrible of underground filmmaking, takes another trip to the depths of cinema's capital city. Readers are advised to fasten their seat belts.

When sexuality was submerged on the screen by censorship, Anger believes, it emerged in interesting covert ways. "All that censorship," he says, "required a high-wire balancing act in order to get some sublety on the screen. It produced some wonderful allusions, which maybe one-tenth of the audience would get and the rest never saw because they were just there to be entertained." Anger feels the same way about the prospect of movie stars coming out of the closet. Such people, he believes, will always be "out" to the cognescenti but not necessarily to those who really don't wish to know. "Who are you talking about?" he asks. "Which public are we discussing? Your mother? My mother? Some people will always be more sophisticated than others. You have to understand that for a mass audience, there will always need to be some degree of fantasy in their viewing habits. That's what they want."

When I mention the number of gay people who cooperate in their own oppression, he understands this too. "You're dealing with human nature," he says simply. "You have an incredible spectrum of people out there who are gay. They all don't share similar views. Listen, things don't change that much, even in terms of gossip. When I was a student at Beverly Hills High School, we would hear all these overt rumors about Cardinal Spellman being gay, about how he would even send his private car to the stage door of Broadway houses to pick up his current chorus boy. This is part of American folk history. Yet today in 1984, the New York Times publishing company just suppressed a whole section of a new Spellman biography dealing with his homosexuality. People don't want to know."

Anger feels that most people have dichotomous personalities and are subject to irrationalities in their reactions to things. This is how he explains the antigay and racist attitudes of some Hollywood stars whose "best friends" are gay or black or Jewish. "One of the reasons Katharine Hepburn is so antigay," he says, "is that her brother Tom was gay, and he hanged himself over an unhappy love affair with a boy when he was 17. John Wayne was the biggest financial backer of the Ku Klux Klan for years—I mean a *lot* of money—it was his hobby to support the Klan. And privately he would tell people he didn't like working with blacks and Jews."

How does Anger find out stuff like this? "Well, it's what we call 'authentic gossip,' " he says. "Someone working as a stunt man on many of John Wayne's films repeated these stories to several people, and it's just been repeated so many times by so many people." Anger says *Hollywood Babylon* is considered a maverick history of Hollywood, and as such it does the work of recalling the past that Hollywood would prefer to forget. When he publishes photos of Elizabeth Taylor looking like Moby Dick, or Judy Garland looking older than the pyramids, it isn't to say that he thinks they've disappointed us. It's to say that they're magnificent in their own way, in spite of all the ravages of time.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 54)

MORE BABBLE ON HOLLYWOOD
SEE PAGE 44

The uniquely relaxed ambiance of Key West is so congenial —and the climate so agreeable all the year — that we relocated our office here early in 1983. Since then so many men have asked us for advice on the island's accommodations that we have selected three favorite guest houses and offer you

The Best of Key West

Our recommended guest houses are lovingly restored homes in the historic Old Town; each has its own individual style, terraces and swimming pool; and the owners provide breakfasts and arrange dinners and boat outings to enable guests from all houses to meet each other.
We make your visit quite effortless by handling air travel and guest house accommodations.

Brochure kits with detailed information and rates available from:

HANNS EBENSTEN TRAVEL, INC
513 FLEMING STREET, KEY WEST, FLORIDA 33040, USA
TELEPHONE (305) 294 8174

Spend a "GAY CHRISTMAS" in New Orleans

A Hotel. . . THE FRENCHMEN
Special 5-day Christmas Package
Call or write for details
Pamper yourself at Christmas . . . or anytime with these FRENCHMEN amenities:
- Affordable Luxury
- French Quarter Charm
- Southern Hospitality
- 24-Hour Concierge
- Pool / Spa
- Excellent Security
- Antique Furnishings
- All Modern Conveniences
- Parking

417 Frenchmen Street
New Orleans, LA 70116
(504) 948-2166
All rooms include a breakfast feast for two at no extra charge

WE BEAT THE NEW YORK TIMES!

ATLAS
Atlas Savings & Loan Association

"Not only did we get more strong inquiries from THE ADVOCATE than local free gay news papers, but your publication produced more than twice the response than from the NEW YORK TIMES . . . dollar for dollar, we believe you can't find a better advertising medium for reaching gay people than THE ADVOCATE."

Kim Cortright
Marketing Director
ATLAS SAVINGS & LOAN

ADVERTISING IN THE ADVOCATE IT WORKS.

agery, it is safe to say, is pervaded by a homoerotic consciousness. The provocative full lips of the male poised over his twin raven-haired female lover in the *Playboy* illustration for "Still Life with Woodpecker" is right out of the fantasy of a gay man hungry to be dominated. A less-veiled, homoerotic fantasy is excitingly caught in the illustration of two lascivious tongue-entwined Asian males *Blueboy* used with an article on "Homosexuality in Japan."

Fantasy and delicious, unrepentant sexuality are Odom's motivators. The pedestrian, real-world drawings he did for *Time* are among the collection's few disappointments. Obviously Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and the Ayatollah Khomeini – Odom's subjects for *Time* – have no place among the androgynes and superbly muscled gods who move seductively through his dream world. No marks of experience or signs of aging crease their idealized faces as they gaze out at the world or at their lover through what might be No-like masks. Feeling is replaced by attitude; stylized beauty and narcissistic pleasure are all that matter. *Dreamer's* haunting revelations are those of a gay utopia, captured by the flowing lines and muted colors of an inspired visionary. **– Bob Summer**

Stopped Rocking & Other Screenplays
by Tennessee Williams
New Directions
hardbound, 384 pp. $24.95 (paper, $9.95)

Two of the screenplays in this new collection were found in the files of Tennessee Williams' New Orleans apartment when it was being cleaned in the mid-1970s. Both works – *All Gaul Is Divided* and *The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond* – were apparently written for films in the 1950s, but no filmmaker ever agreed to produce them.

Now, New Directions (which has been publishing a handsome, seven-volume set of all of Williams' plays) combines this pair with two other unproduced screenplays. Interestingly, *All Gaul* is an expanded version of Williams' *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur*. The second – an intended film about debutante society in Memphis and on the Mississippi Delta plantations – echoes some of "the gentleman callers" of *The Glass Menagerie*. The third screenplay in the volume is set in a mental hospital and has overtones of Williams' *Suddenly, Last Summer*, as well as his play about Zelda Fitzgerald's confinement in an institution, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*.

The fourth screen work is the one that is of most interest to gay readers. Based on his by-now famous homosexual short story, *One Arm* is a fascinating might-have-been of a film, dealing as it does with young homosexual hustlers and murder. Had it found a daring director, it would easily have been as grittily realistic and powerful as John Schlesinger's 1968 *Midnight Cowboy* or Paul Morrissey's *Forty Deuce*. Sadly (and we are fortunate to have had even that one), only Williams' *Baby Doll* made it to the screen as an original film work by the playwright. **– Jere Real**

BABBLES ON

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37)

"These people had something called star charisma," he says. "Elizabeth Taylor is the last star, as far as I'm concerned. Judy Garland at her most haggard was still brilliant. To me, it's a great pity that when Liz Taylor was fat in 1979 and married to that senator with the huge dick, she didn't immortalize the way she looked by playing the Roman empress Messalina. She'd have looked like a living Beardsley drawing, and it would've been incredible. Now she looks awful with that Miami Beach bleached-out hair. Stars have to be unusual. As far as I'm concerned, nobody will ever line up to see Meryl Streep when she gets old the way we have for Bette Davis."

Anger understands the attraction gay men have had for strong women on the screen, but he thinks it's a lost phenomenon. "Crawford and Davis were the two most obvious examples of stars who were worshipped by gay men, myself included. I remember ducking out of high school to go to the opening day of *Deception*. In a sense I spent my 20s during the best years, the 1950s. Most people say, 'Oh, what a horrible time the '50s were,' and I always say, 'But we had something you don't have – we had *live* Maria Callas on the stage, and Judy Garland and Marlene Dietrich. We're talking, though, about a historical gay man who really doesn't exist anymore. As far as I'm concerned, they can keep their Julio Iglesias."

Anger is very happy with *Hollywood Babylon II* in spite of the cuts, and he would like to begin raising money for another film, one populated totally by Mickey Mouse toys and with a jazz score. "But it's so hard these days to raise enough money," he says. "I made *Fireworks* for $200. Now you need at least $100,000 to do a decent film. That's why I keep writing. I need the money to pursue the work. I'm an orphan, actually. My father cut me out of his will because I was the gay black sheep. Just like Crawford did to Christina. Can you *imagine* that mean old bitch? But I didn't like my father either, so it doesn't matter. I'm happy. I'm on my own. I write. I make movies. I live in New York. I just wish I could make more films and hope that my work won't be forgotten. I've never had a broken heart because I wasn't a Hollywood filmmaker." ●